

Growing in Christ (Hebrews 5:11-6:12)

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[0:00] Amen. Children, we are ready for Children's Church at this time. You may make your way to the back. Isn't it a blessing? The things that we believe, the things that Scripture tells us are true of us and that will be true of our eternity.

And my goodness, what a joy it is to come together with other believers and proclaim those truths, to sing those truths, to stand on the promises of God.

I am so thankful that we are able to be here today to celebrate the good news that we have a risen Savior and that His name is Jesus. And because of Him, we have hope.

What a joy that is. And I'm also grateful for this church and our commitment to missions. Evan mentioned earlier, but I just want to highlight again, I had a goal of \$12,000 to go to Annie Armstrong, brought in over \$21,000.

I think we need to up the goal next year. That is an incredible opportunity, incredible heart behind those individuals in our church who see the message that we have as worthy of investing in, not just our time, but our resources and saying, hey, we want to make sure this good news is proclaimed all over North America.

[1:19] And not only did we meet and exceed our goal to Annie Armstrong, but we also earlier, we met and exceeded our goal to Lottie Moon. So this message that we're proclaiming, this hope that we have is a hope that we want to share with everyone across this world.

And I'm so very thankful for that. Today, we're going to be back in the book of Hebrews. And so if you have a copy of God's Word, I want to invite you to go ahead and turn with me to Hebrews chapter 5.

We're going to be in verses 5, 11 through 6, 12 today. And so I want you to go ahead and make your way there. But as you're turning there, I want you to think with me about something for just a moment. Maybe this applies to you, or maybe it applied to you at some point in your life.

But I'm willing to guess we all know somebody that this applies to. But how many of us in here have ever lived by, near, at one point in time or now, or known somebody that lives near railroad tracks? Does that apply to anybody? Okay, most of us either have lived by railroad tracks or know somebody that has lived by some railroad tracks.

[2:29] And what's amazing to me is the people who live near railroad tracks don't even hear a train anymore. It's amazing to me. I think part of it is because I love trains.

And so I'm like a little kid. I hear a train. I'm like, oh, where's the train at? I want to see it. I still count the cars whenever I'm stopped at a railroad track.

And I get a little bit excited when I see multiple engines on the front. I'm like, oh, this is going to be a long one. This is going to be a big train. And so I like trains, but it amazes me that you can be at someone's house that has lived by railroad tracks for a long time, and they don't even hear it anymore.

They don't even notice it anymore when a train goes by. They've gotten so used to the trains that they don't even look up or even pay attention when a train goes by. But it's not just trains.

For example, men can get so used to hearing a child cry that they don't even wake up for it in the middle of the night. For some reason, women are immune to this. They wake up every single time.

[3:31] Catherine says, I just developed like a reflex. I just had this little nudge. I said, sweetie, every time that I heard a child cry. But we can get so used to these things that are around us that we become desensitized to the sights and sounds around us, so much so that obvious things are no longer obvious.

Now, if you live beside some railroad tracks, this is a really good thing. But when it comes to reading God's Word, this is a really bad thing. This is a really bad thing if we get so used to God's

Word that we become desensitized so that we don't even pay attention to it anymore.

The author of Hebrews has some pretty direct words concerning this for us today. And so I want to encourage you, if you've made your way to Hebrews chapter 5, starting in verse 11, to follow along as we read these words.

It says this, About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.

You need milk, not solid food. For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature.

[4 : 58] For those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish between good from evil. Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith towards God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift and shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to content.

For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.

But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless, and near being cursed, and in its end is to be burned. Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things, things that belong to salvation, for God is not unjust, so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness, to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

[6 : 49] As we read through this, much of these warnings sound like a father speaking to his son, or at least like I remember my dad speaking to me. You don't listen.

You should be doing more for yourself by now. In fact, I don't even know if you're mine. I'm joking about that last part, but he said all those other things at different times.

But there are a few observations from this passage that I want to bring our attention to this morning. We will see the problem, and we'll see the solution, but I also want us to see a truth that is sandwiched in between the problem and the solution here.

But the first thing that I want to bring our attention to is this, is identifying the problem, and that is dullness of hearing. We must identify the problem, which is dullness of hearing.

He says, You see, up to this point, the author has described the problem and described the remedy for the problem over and over again, but he hasn't come right out and said it.

[8 : 01] We've seen him describe it, and we've seen some things we must do. In chapter 2, he's told us that we are to make sure that we pay attention, or pay much closer attention to what he's telling us.

In chapter 3, he tells us we must consider Jesus. And again there, he tells us, Don't harden your heart. And in verse 14, The last time we were in this, we were told to hold fast to our confession. We must hold fast to what we believe. Now he diagnoses the problem. He says, You have become dull of hearing. In the previous verse, the author has just begun to talk about Jesus, and our great and perfect high priest that he is.

He's a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. And so understanding that, we realize that he is both a priest and a king. He is a king forever. He's a priest forever.

And he stops himself before he returns to this later. And next week we'll get into that more. But he stops himself, and he says, About this, we have much to say, and it's hard to explain, because you have become dull of hearing.

[9 : 13] So why is this hard to explain? Is it because his readers aren't very smart? Is it because the concept he's trying to communicate are so deep and so complex that they just go right over their head?

No. It's because these Christians that he is speaking to aren't listening. They may be hearing the words. They may be hearing it, but they're just going in one ear and out the other they're hearing, but they're not listening.

What we have to remember is that the author is writing to a group of believers. At one time they were growing and maturing, and they were doing all of these things, but they have become dull of hearing.

The word dull here means sluggish or lethargic. And so basically the author is calling them lazy.

Basically he's saying, Look, you've become lazy.

You've stopped growing in your faith. You've stopped listening to these things. You've just become lazy. And in fact, this is how the Christian Standard Bible translates. It says, You have become too lazy to understand.

[10:22] And so what we see as the root cause of their spiritual immaturity is that they have become too lazy. Now I know all of you during your high school and college days were all just incredibly wonderful students.

That you were always on top of everything. That nothing was ever late or anything like that. For me, that was not always the case. I like to procrastinate a little bit. And then I would come up with excuses and these clever little sayings to kind of make it funny while I was procrastinating.

I'll say, You know, Well, I just do my best work under pressure. And so it's not procrastinating. It's just overachieving that I'm waiting till the end. But when all of those things, even if you're procrastinating, all of those things have a due date, right?

Even if you procrastinate with the paper that is due, even if you wait till the last minute, there is a due date. And so if you're going to succeed in school, you're going to have to make sure that if you do it ahead of time or at the last minute, that it gets done.

There's always a date for that test to take place. There's always a time when this must happen. But oftentimes, when it comes to our faith, we don't see the same sense of urgency.

[11:39] And we procrastinate. And we say that at some point in the future, we'll begin this. At some point later down the road, I'll begin to become more disciplined. It's just I've got so much going on in my life right now that that's going to have to wait for another day.

The problem is for many of us, that day doesn't come. And we've become like the Hebrews here, we've become dull of hearing and lazy in our spiritual walk.

We know it's important. We know we should be growing, but we put it off for another day. And this is the root of the problem that the author is, he's treated the symptoms and now he identifies the disease.

Piper says it like this. He says, this is what is behind all of those exhortations up to this point. Where he says, pay close attention, consider Jesus, don't harden your heart, fear, be diligent, hold fast.

These are doctor's prescriptions for the disease of dullness of hearing. And so it's important for us to take steps in order to assess our current condition.

[12:50] That we honestly ask ourselves, are we just dull of hearing or is there a bigger problem that is at stake here? Have we just become dull of hearing or is there a much bigger problem that we must deal with?

The issue of whether or not we are actually true believers. And so before we get into the remedy of our condition, before we get into the fix, the solution for our condition of being dull listeners, I want us to jump down to the end of the passage that we read for just a moment and consider the truth that faith in Christ produces faithfulness to Christ.

Faith in Christ always produces faithfulness to Christ. The section of Scripture that I am about to read for us again is probably some of the most difficult verses that you will find in the New Testament to wrap our minds around.

And so I want you to listen as we read a portion of chapter 6, verses 4 through 12. The first part of that, starting in verse 4, says this, For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come and then have fallen away to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding Him up to contempt.

Now, I'm not going to spend a great deal of time in this section because we've already discussed on two other occasions much of these same themes, but I also don't want us to skip such a strong warning that we have in this passage.

[14:49] Now, we've already addressed this a couple of times, so we're not going to go into incredible detail here, but I also don't want us to just bypass over this because this is a very strong warning.

Now, I've said this multiple times before, but I think it bears repeating again. When it comes to difficult passages, when it comes to passages that are hard to understand, it's best not to interpret them in isolation.

It's best not to just interpret them in isolation, and what we do is we let Scripture interpret Scripture. In other words, we let clear passages shed light on less clear passages.

And so when we think about that as we come to this, there's a couple options, two main options that people will come to when they come to this passage. One option is that people will explain this this way, that these people being talked about here in this passage are genuine believers.

They have truly repented of their sins, were united with Christ, and were active in the body of believers, and then they fell away. If this is true, then this is a frightful warning for many genuine Christians will fall away from the faith.

[16:05] They will lose their salvation. Scripture, however, rules out this interpretation. The Bible repeatedly tells us that God keeps us.

The Bible repeatedly tells us, Paul over and over again in many of his letters, tells us that God who began the good work, and you will see it through to completion. In 1 John 2.19, and really much of the rest of 1 John, John tells us that these people in leaving the faith showed that they were never truly a part of the faith to begin with.

And so the other option that I want us to consider is the one that I think is most true to this text and Scripture as a whole, is that this passage is, it really is a warning, but it's not a warning to the true believer.

Rather, it is a caution for individuals who have seen the gospel, understood the gospel, but not truly believed.

For those individuals who may have grown up in the church, they've heard this message their whole life, they understand it, they may even know that there's a need for it in their lives, but they've never given their life to Jesus.

[17:24] And so may we be honest with ourselves that this may never be said of us, that we have heard, that we understand, that we knew we needed to give our life to Christ, but we never did.

You see, perseverance is the test of true faith. Jesus made the point in the parable of the sower when He indicated that some seed immediately sprang up.

It looked like it was going to grow, but it didn't last because it had no depth of soil. The author over and over again is giving us a sobering warning in the book of Hebrews not to scare us, not to cause us to live in fear that we can lose our salvation, but to honestly ask ourselves, is Jesus truly our Lord and Savior?

You see, responding to Jesus means not only hearing Him, but trusting and following Him. It is believing that He is the only one that can save you from your sins, take you from death to life, and in response to that belief, choosing to walk in obedience to His commands.

This is what a disciple does. This is what a follower of Jesus does. Because you see, faith in Christ always produces faithfulness to Christ.

[18:45] A saving relationship with Jesus is always going to change us. A life-changing experience of placing your faith and trust in Jesus is always going to lead to life change.

And the question we must honestly ask ourselves is this. If I'm not growing in my relationship with God, is it because I'm dull of hearing or is it because I've never placed my faith in Christ?

But here's the thing, I've got good news no matter how you answer that question. You can place your faith in Jesus today. And you can begin growing today.

And so this brings us to the solution to the problem found in this process. Remember, the problem is that they have become dull of hearing, that they've become lazy in their spiritual walk, but here's the solution.

And this is earth-shattering news right here, alright? The solution is growth in Christ. It's just to begin growing. Let's go back to the end of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6, verses 5-12-6-3.

[19:57] For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food.

For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith toward God and of instruction about washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of dead and eternal judgment.

And this we will do if God permits. You see, most of us can understand this passage pretty well.

These believers are being ineffective for Christ due to a lack of maturity.

These believers, they should be teaching others and not just talking about teaching others from a preaching standpoint or even a Sunday school standpoint, a small group standpoint, but they should be teaching others.

[21 : 13] They should be sharing their faith with others. This is something that should be evident of all believers. They should be teaching others. They should be sharing with others, their faith, and yet they're not.

And it's due to this ineffectiveness because they're not growing. They're not growing. And because they aren't growing, they aren't fit to do what God has called them to do.

The author says, because you aren't growing, we have to revisit everything. We have to continue to go back over this over and over again.

It's kind of like he's saying, all we're doing is treading water here. He's not saying you aren't busy.

He's not saying that we're not doing things. He's saying that you aren't maturing.

You see, treading water, I don't know if you've ever done this before or not, but treading water is a lot of work. And guess where you go? Nowhere. He's not saying you're not doing things.

[22 : 10] He's saying you're not growing in your faith. We can be busy with church, but not growing. You see, I'm convinced that there are lots of people in churches all over the world that are busy working in churches where everything looks good on the outside, but they minimize their effectiveness for the Lord because of a lack of growth.

On the outside, they look busy. They're constantly doing things over and over again, but yet they're trivializing their effectiveness for God because of a lack of growth.

They're doing good things, but those good things are getting in the way of the best that God has for them. Those good things are keeping them from the best that God has for him.

I agree with several commentators that verse 14 is kind of the key verse for us understanding our solution to the problem of being dull of hearing or being lazy in our walk with Christ.

Verse 14 says, But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

[23 : 23] If solid food is for the mature, then how do you become mature? If solid food is for the mature, then the question becomes, how do you get to that point?

And the way that you get to that point is a healthy and consistent and constant dose of milk. You see, it's okay for a baby to drink milk because they're growing.

They need this. And so, how do we get to the point of being able to eat solid food? It's by consistently consuming that milk. Piper, he notes it this way.

He says, This is how you grow from a baby Christian to a mature Christian. From the milk of the word to the muscle of faith to acts of righteousness. We grow in our knowledge of God, which leads to grow in trust and faith, which leads to grow in action.

We grow in all of these things. After having three kids, one of the things that I've noticed is they grow up too quickly. Anybody want to agree with that?

[24 : 30] You know, it's so many times you think that everybody tells you, Oh, these are the best days when they're little and all you can think about when they're little is I can't wait for them to get out of diapers.

I can't wait till they can get a shower by themselves. I can't wait till they can do these things. And then guess what? The problems just get bigger and they get more expensive and all kinds of other things. But in those moments, it just goes so quickly.

It seems like just yesterday that Catherine and I were moving down here from North Carolina and Jacob was one years old. It seems like just yesterday. Well, turns out 14 years ago seems like yesterday.

And from talking with many of you who have kids older than our kids, it doesn't slow down. It just seems to go faster and faster. And so I remember a couple of years ago after a pretty severe thunder and lightning storm, I walked up to Charlotte's room to wake her up the next morning. And the first thing that she said to me was, Daddy, did you hear that thunder? Daddy, did you hear that? And I was trying to downplay it to let her know that there was nothing to worry about. [25 : 39] And I said, I did hear it. I like listening to thunder. And she thought about that for a minute and could tell that her wheels were turning in her mind. She goes, me too.

When I was little, I was scared of thunder, but now I'm a big girl. And this was several years ago that she's saying this. And so it was one of those bittersweet moments for me as a parent. My baby is getting bigger. You miss the fact that they aren't a baby anymore, but at the same time, you're excited for them because they're doing exactly what they're supposed to do. They're growing. They're maturing. In fact, if they weren't growing and maturing, that would be a sign that something was wrong. You know, when you take your kids to their doctor's appointments when they're young, the first thing that they do is they check their height and weight. Because it's a good thing if your kids are growing taller and heavier. I miss those days. Now the doctor doesn't want me to get heavier. But as a child, this is a sign that things are going in a good direction.

[26 : 49] This is a sign that they're growing, that everything is as it should be. The point is growth is vital. It's a part of being a mature Christian.

Just the, not too long ago, I was looking at some research that was done by the Barna Group and this research is a little bit older now. It's probably seven or eight years old at this point. But I'm going to go out on a limb and just guess that the research, that the things have not gotten any better. In the research, it showed that almost 30% of professing Christians, now again, this is professing Christians, this is not just 30% of the general population, but 30% of professing Christians believe that all people pray to the same God or spirit no matter what name they use for that spiritual being. 30% of professing Christians believe that. In that same study, more than a quarter of professing Christians believe that meaning and purpose come from being one with all that is. Meaning and purpose come from being one with all that is out there. I'm not even sure what that means. I'm not even sure what that means, but I can promise you that meaning and purpose come from God who created you for the purpose of worshiping Him.

[28 : 20] If we are not growing in our relationship with God, then we are sliding further away from maturity. If we're not growing in our relationship with Him, then we're sliding further away.

If we aren't growing in truth, then it becomes really easy for us to believe the lies that anybody will tell us. If we aren't growing in truth, then it becomes easy to believe a lie.

If you and I want to grow in spiritual maturity, and remember, this is crucial to our relationship with God, this is the solution to the problem of dullness of hearing or being lethargic or lazy in our growth in our relationship with Christ, then we must daily follow Jesus.

We must daily grow in our relationship with Him. We do this by growing in our knowledge of who He is by reading His Word. This is the greatest way that we can grow in our relationship with God.

If you want to grow and mature in your relationship with the Lord, then read His Word. Develop a habit of that. Not just reading it for completion.

[29 : 30] You know, it's great if you want to set a goal, read it through in a year, but I would just rather you just pick it up and read it and follow along with what God is telling us. We do this by growing in our relationship with Him by reading His Word, which causes us to trust Him more.

And as we realize that He always keeps His promises, that He is worthy of our trust more than anybody else, He's worthy of our trust, then we freely and willingly say, Lord, here's my life.

Take it and use it because I realize that You are worthy of trust. You see, as we grow in our knowledge of who God is, if we're actually growing, then we realize that He and He alone is worthy of our trust.

He and He alone is the one that we can give our life to and we give our life to Him and say, Lord, here's my life. Take it and use it. I'd rather follow You and where You have me go even if it means that I move somewhere different.

Even if it moves that I do something different in my life, I would rather follow You because I realize that You are far more trustworthy than the lies that other people may be telling me.

[30 : 43] And so we grow in our knowledge of who He is which allows us to trust Him more, which allows us to give our lives to Him and say, Lord, here's my life. Take it and use it.

This is what it means to follow Jesus. And as we do this day after day, year after year, we grow by leaps and bounds and begin to see God more clearly.

I love how C.S. Lewis describes this in the Narnia series. And this is probably one of my favorite conversations, one of my favorite parts of the whole series is when Aslan is having this conversation with Lucy after a long absence.

And Aslan said, Lucy, this is how it begins. Aslan said, Lucy, you're bigger. This is because you're older, little one, he answered. Not because you are, said Lucy.

I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger. May that be our desire. That as we grow in our relationship with God, that we see Him more clearly.

[31 : 58] That He becomes bigger in our lives. Not because He is bigger. He's always been that big. But because we understand Him more, we're growing in that faith, we're trusting Him more, and because of that we see Him more and more clearly for who He truly is.

And so may we honestly come to this passage. May we honestly come to this passage and ask some questions of ourselves. You see, here's the thing, we can lie to ourselves, we can lie to everybody else around us, but we can't lie to God.

And so I want to encourage you to honestly come to this passage and ask these questions. Have I become dull of hearing? Have I become dull of hearing in my relationship with God?

Have I become lazy in my relationship with God? And then ask yourself, is it that I'm dull of hearing? Or is it because I've never trusted in Jesus?

Am I not growing because I've become dull of hearing, or am I not growing because I don't have the relationship to begin with? And so I want to encourage you, if you're here today and you've never placed your faith and your trust in Jesus, then this is something that you can do today.

[33 : 14] You can go from death to life. If you've never placed your faith and trust in Jesus, where you understand Jesus as your only hope in this life, where you understand that He's the one who left the glory of heaven, lived the perfect life that you and I couldn't live, died the death that we deserve, and then three days later was raised from the grave because it was not possible for death to hold Him, if you've never placed your faith and your trust in Him, then let me encourage you, let that be where you start today.

Because that is the beginning of a relationship with Him. It's the beginning of a relationship that we're all called to grow for the rest of our lives, to grow deeper into, to grow deeper in our understanding of Him.

And then the final thing is this, are we going to commit, all of us, to grow so that we can be better used by God? Have we become dull of hearing?

Have we placed our faith in Jesus? And are we going to commit to grow so that we can be better used by Him? In just a moment, we're going to stand together and we're going to sing a song of invitation.

And I want to encourage you to be honest with yourself in these things. Maybe this morning you need to come forward and pray to receive Christ. Well, praise the Lord. But maybe you just need to sit right where you are and be honest with yourself as everybody else stands up and begins to sing and you need to pray.

[34 : 46] You say, Lord, I've been lazy. I've become dull of hearing and I want that to change. I want to commit to growing in my relationship with you.

You may want to do that right there. You may want to come down. There's nothing special about the front of this stage but that may be a way of committing saying, I'm serious about this. Maybe you want to come down here and pray.

Maybe you want to come pray with me. I'd love to pray. I'd love to pray with you. But I want to encourage you to respond however it is that God is leading this morning.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, thank you so very much. For Jesus, Lord, we thank you for the relationship that you give us in him. Lord, we thank you that by placing our faith and our trust in him, we can go from death to life.

That we can go from being an enemy to a child. And so, Lord, I pray that there's someone here today that has never done that. Let today be the day that they go from death to life.

[35 : 44] But, Lord, I also pray that for many of us as we think about our relationship with you, a genuine and true relationship with you, Lord, may we honestly ask ourselves in what ways have we become dull of hearing?

In what ways have we become lazy in our walk with you? In what ways have we diminished our usefulness to you because of our laziness? And so, Lord, let us repent of that.

Let us commit ourselves to growing in our relationship with you so that we can be better used by you. Lord, I pray that as we dive into your word that our eyes would be open to see you for who you are.

That we grow in not only our knowledge of who you are but in our trust of who you are. And as we learn to trust you more, Lord, I pray that we get to the point where we say, Lord, here's my life. Take it and use it. I want to follow you more than I want to follow me. I want to follow you more than I want to follow anybody else that's telling me what I need to do with my life.

[36 : 53] Lord, may we get to that point so that we can be used by you for your honor and your glory. And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want to invite you to stand. We're going to sing a song of invitation that the Lord is speaking. Won't you respond as we stand together and sing? who have who have who have who have!

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